

BOOK REVIEWS

Bhatkhande's Contribution

to Music:

A Historical Perspective

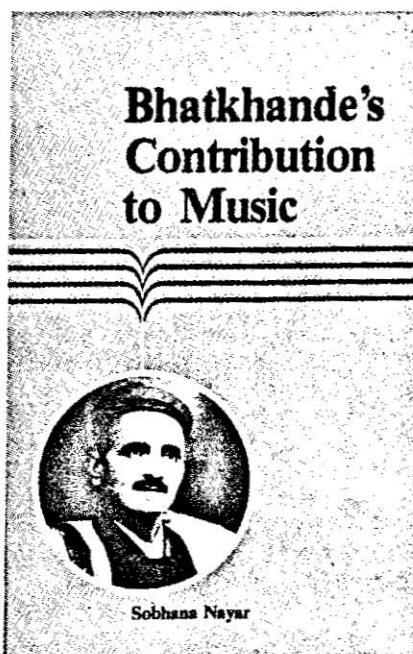
Shobhana Nayar

Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1989

XVI + 362 pages, Rs 200 (hardbound)

This is certainly a good subject, or could be turned into one. Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860-1936) is remembered for his achievements in three areas of Indian music and musical ideas. Socially the most important was the part he played in making basic musical education more generally available. In the academic field he was one of the most effective pioneers in the historical study of Indian musicology from textual sources. Finally, and most controversially, his theoretical or 'scientific' thinking has made an indelible impact on subsequent writing about Hindustani music.

What are the opportunities here for the research student? There is surely ample scope for detailed investigation of certain parts of Bhatkhande's work, but, given that we already have some writings of a general nature about him, it may be less desirable to take on all three of the areas just mentioned as a 'package', as Sobhana Nayar has done. Of course, if it were demonstrable that Bhatkhande had been seriously misunderstood, or if some startling new information greatly enhanced our appreciation of him, then a new biography or general study would be in order. Sobhana Nayar has not used any such material, and she gives in her book no indication of having gained access to any.



Unpublished papers are known to exist, including letters, travelogues and diaries. The diary of the 1904 south India travels (माझ्या दक्षिणेचा प्रवास) was published in a Hindi translation by A.C. Chaubey three years before the present book, and much remains to be brought out, or before that at least to be read. It would be of interest to know whether the music colleges founded by Bhatkhande at Baroda, Gwalior and Lucknow have any important additional archive material relating to him. Nayar has depended on the better known published writings of Bhatkhande himself, and on two secondary works; one of these is the engag-

ing 60-page homage by his pupil S.N. Ratanjankar in the National Book Trust's National Biography Series (*Pandit Bhatkhande*, New Delhi, 1967), the other the more substantial, though less easily available, *Bhatkhande Commemoration Volume* (भातखण्डे सूति ग्रन्थ), edited by P.N. Chinchore (Khairagarh, 1966), in which a Hindi biography by Ratanjankar appears together with other valuable articles in Hindi, and a few in English, and some of Bhatkhande's letters, speeches and compositions. These two books give us a reasonably vivid picture of the man and his work. For both the biographical and the more musicological sides of her book, and for both the factual and the critical, Nayar has used them extensively; long extracts are copied or translated, usually with due acknowledgement in an endnote but not always with total fidelity. Despite its generally poor organization and frequent (even verbatim) repetitiveness, this may be pleasant reading for some. Nayar's book is not 'scholarly'; she slips most naturally into a hagiographical style, a kind of Bhatkhande-Digvijaya in which fact and eulogy blend into an often excessively sentimental narrative.

There are some additions. First, 40 pages of the 'Age of Bhatkhande' and the 'State of Contemporary Music' (i.e., contemporary with Bhatkhande). Then there are accounts of his publications, his collecting of historical sources, his notation system, theoretical concepts and pedagogical methods. Potentially the most original is a chapter on Bhatkhande the composer, in which many pieces (Khyāls, Dhrupads, and rāga-defining Laksāṇagītās) are extracted from published sources and subjected to brief description and analysis. Nayar's literary comments on the poetic compositions are unenlightening, but there are some observations on language and technique which may well be of value and interest to students of Hindustani singing.

The opening historical chapters are devout but somewhat naïve and clichéd restatements of material easily available elsewhere.

It is, of course, a worthwhile aim to place Bhatkhande's work in true historical perspective. Here there may be room for reassessment of what has become an orthodoxy, namely that "like all other branches of culture, art and education, music also reached a stage of degeneration with the advent of British rule", and "it was Bhatkhande, who performed the herculean task of rescuing it from the decadent state and re-establishing it as a major force in our cultural life" (Nayar, p. 20f.). Several issues are bound up in such a characterization of the late-19th-century position. To speak of music alone, we can at least say that there was plenty of it around, as indeed found and splendidly collected and documented by Bhatkhande himself, though, ironically, his permanent recording of some names—performers, traditions and compositions—may have obfuscated the need to rescue others from oblivion; historical research must continue in this field, a field which British life and manners utterly failed to penetrate. Nayar relays to us a complex of attitudes to the *gharānās*. There is, incidentally, no evidence that they are as old as an institution as has frequently been claimed, and in any case the description of 'group styles' as propagated over time by particular *gharānās* has proved highly elusive, indeed misconceived. (In this connection there are useful remarks in M. Lath's article, 'What is Khyal?' in the *National Centre for Performing Arts Quarterly Journal*, 17, 1988, pp. 1–11). For Nayar, the *gharānās* of the late 19th and early 20th centuries seem to emblemize the corrupt, reactionary, and exclusive character of musicians of that time, unwilling to share or impart their knowledge and style, and jealously guarding their family traditions. Vocal music particularly was, it seems, dominated by *gharānās*, professional prestige groups associated with eponymous origins in places, persons, and families. They were generally considered to be the repositories of *gharānēdār gāyakī*, which is a conceptual term that quite properly excites Nayar's approval. Also, importantly, the

gharānās were guardians of specific repertoires, including both compositions and sometimes structural varieties of particular *rāgas*. The *gharānās* had close association with court patronage, but were not coterminous with it; as a mark of authenticity and prestige (as in Nayar's own biographical notes on the jacket of her book), the training of a performer is still now often traced to certain of these traditions. They are an example of *guru-śisya paramparā*; though this term could in fact be applied to any training lineage, it has often been used as a polemical tool to wield against those who were trained, supposed without a *paramparā*, in institutions like those started by Bhatkhande. But, as Nayar points out (p. 193), Bhatkhande was insistent that the college training was only a beginning, after which the talented and motivated student should continue to study with a renowned artist. (The gradual reduction of what was expected of students at the Gwalior school surely shows both the superficiality of what was at first expected—an incredibly daunting repertory in four years—and also the recognition that training was to be perfected elsewhere.)

P.N. Chinchore (Commemoration Volume, p. 163) indicates that in his private notes Bhatkhande did keep notes of his sources, but it is interesting that he was reluctant to publish, in the क्रमिक पुस्तक मालिका, etc., the origins of compositions he collected from various *gharānās*. Nayar does not really excuse him by saying that he was "keen to keep the future generations and the students of music away from the stifling atmosphere and factional quarrels of the *gharānā* system" (p. 93). After all, publication itself was enough to make the compositions common property, and the historian of music would have benefited greatly if Bhatkhande had left a clear record of his 'find spots'. Did Bhatkhande, meticulous as he was in his quest for earlier historical material, perhaps not regard the *gharānās* as such an important feature in music history, worthy of complete documentation? Indeed he does seem to

have favoured the currency of a more 'general' style and repertoire; not only did he wish to combat the exclusiveness of *gharānā*-based rivalry, but he also chose, in documenting musical structures, to 'correct' what anomalies he thought he had discovered. His books refer to 'Hindustani Music', and suggest a notion of something like a common underlying practice. The relation of notated *bandish* to actual performance, and to varieties of rendering, would be a fruitful subject for separate investigation.

Nayar's view is that when 'discrepancies' were found between what he heard and what he and his consultants thought 'correct', whether in verbal text or in melodic line, "it was necessary to correct and standardize them and make them flawless before they could be published". Present-day historians of music may rue the loss of evidence of artistic diversity. It has been made the more serious since, as Nayar tells us, the phonograph recordings Bhatkhande made are no longer usable; a version of a composition communicated in oral tradition and successfully performed is, in a sense, artistically valid. It is useless to criticize the methods of scholars who worked under different presuppositions, but nowadays the exercise of 'documentation' would tend to preserve evidence of variant forms. Is it not likely that one effect of the work of Bhatkhande and others was to rigidify some musical structures, including the *rāgas* themselves? If this is the case, it is important to record from oral tradition what may still survive of variant practice.

Bhatkhande's implicit notion of orthodoxy can be seen in his theoretical writings. Take his Sanskrit works, which it is a mistake to view simply as an antiquarian exercise on his part. Is it enough to say (as Nayar does, p. 98) that he wrote the लक्ष्यसङ्कीर्त in this language so that "musicologists of all the corners of this country could read it", or (p. 100) that his Sanskrit writings "show his deep respect for the Indian culture and tradition"? (The work that brings this

comment is, incidentally, wrongly ascribed to Bhatkhande by Nayar, presumably following a similar mistake in some other book and not examining the text itself.) It must be remembered that the Marathi textbooks, and subsequently their Hindi translations, refer to the Sanskrit works — his own among others — in the ‘canon’ of *sangītaśāstra*, as authority for his statements on music theory. They are part of the fundament on which Bhatkhande’s discursive writing is a commentary. Take an example from Part III of the भातखण्डे संगीत-शास्त्र, p.163:

Question: What does the तत्त्वसङ्ग्रह contain on this matter?
Answer: Catura [= V.N. Bhatkhande] says: *Karmavar-dhani...*

And, in the ऋग्वेदिक पुस्तक मालिका, *rāgalakṣaṇa* verses from Bhatkhande’s own अभिनवरागमन्तर्यामी are characteristically slipped in with other texts before a plain vernacular prose description of the *rāga*’s salient points. Bhatkhande’s use of Sanskrit for these works was an additional imprint of ‘traditional’ authority, updating what, as Nayar properly explains, he considered was obsolete historical material in the older sources, and establishing his own writings as a valid part of the canon — particularly valid because it dealt with current practice. What might appear as coyness in his use of Sanskrit pseudonyms — Catura, Caturapandita, Viṣṇuśarman — is perfectly conventional in this tradition, and Nayar makes too heavy weather of it.

Some of Bhatkhande’s theoretical preoccupations can now be seen to have taken him along a musicological blind alley—I would include here his investigations of the *rāga-samaya* connection and the nature of the *śruti* intervals. It was above all with his systems of notation—arguably the best yet,

and one that has survived the test of time—and *rāga* classification that Bhatkhande made himself a household name for Hindustani musicians. Nayar’s book gives an adequate account his ten-*thāt* system, but she has really missed an opportunity to chart the development of this classificatory principle and the debates it has engendered. For the earlier history it is perhaps unfair to expect in this context a scientific evaluation of the Sanskrit sources, as, despite the (mostly untranslated) quotations in her text, this is clearly not her field. But for the post-Bhatkhande era it is important to take fuller account of the different opinions of other musicians and scholars—Omkarnath Thakur, K.C.D. Brahaspati, P.L. Sharma and others. Bhatkhande, it may be suggested, ‘contributed’ not only a system but also fuel for a lively theoretical and pedagogical argument.

Nayar’s coverage of the Bhatkhande music schools and their development makes interesting reading, and it is useful to have in one place some record of their aims and achievements. As a prerequisite for future studies of Bhatkhande, the bibliography must be sorted out once and for all. There is a story to be told, for instance, about the conversion of the Marathi works into the Hindi versions, and the chronology is important. Nayar is slipshod in her references; the reader is constantly referred to second-hand sources in Ratanjankar and Chinchore, which should have been checked. The bibliography gives far too little information about editions of Bhatkhande’s works, and no dates. With some effort the information is recoverable from bibliographies and from the Hathras Hindi editions.

Jonathan Katz

Sitar Music in Calcutta
An Ethnomusicological Study

James Sadler Hamilton

The University of Calgary Press,
Calgary (Canada), 1989

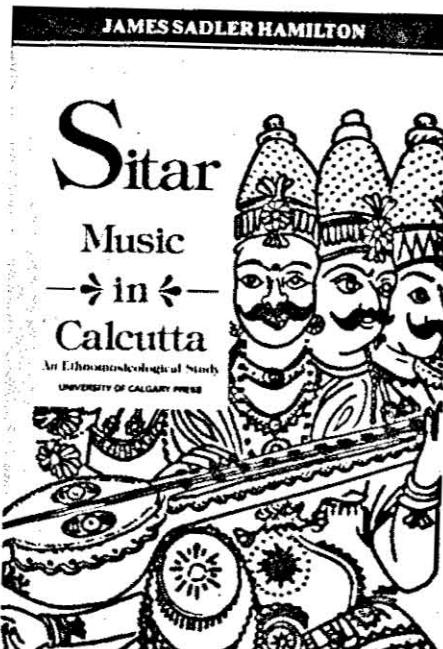
310 pages, 54 figures, 17 maps, 14
genealogical charts, 16 tables; price
not mentioned

Based on the author's doctoral thesis, this work is purportedly a study of the Sitar as practised in Calcutta. However, the Sarod and vocal music are also dealt with, as well as several topics of ethnographic import. In fact, the book begins with an ethnographic account, the purpose of which is:

to point out that nothing in India exists in a vacuum... the organization of society, the view of material objects and also time and space found throughout most of South Asia. This perception also influences the choice of musical instruments and the organisation of musical material.

Later in this introductory chapter, subtitled 'The Indian Mode of Perception', the author describes the Indian social structure and Hindu and Muslim religious beliefs. He talks about the caste system at length and its operation in music. It is stated here that percussion instruments using animal skin, string instruments like the Sarangi in which gut strings are used, or wind instruments like the Shehnai which are touched by Saliva, are considered inferior to instruments in which metal strings are used. The Hindu aversion towards instruments employing gut or skin also finds mention and a connection is established with the vegetarianism of Hindus.

Such theorization is in evident ignorance of Indian realities. The Sarod and Pakhawaj, to name just two instruments using skin, are nowise considered inferior or 'impure'. In fact, the Pakhawaj is strongly associated with the Vaishnavite tradition and has always been played in temples. Regarding the place of the Sarangi *vis à vis* instruments



using metal strings, the fact is that while the Veena, Sitar, Sarod, Esraj, etc. followed the Dhrupad anga and later emerged as solo instruments, the Sarangi was always used as an accompanying instrument and thus remained lower in the hierarchy. The gut strings did not tie it down to its place. As for wind instruments, the flute was probably the commonest instrument after the Veena in the Vedic period, while the Shehnai has been associated with social or festive occasions of both Hindus and Muslims. The players have also been both Hindu and Muslim. The author's imputation of caste and religion to Indian instruments, so to speak, is not only wrong but potentially mischievous.

The last section of the introductory chapter presents some concepts of Indian cosmology and religion. Largely, this is undigested, second-hand material which need not have found a place in a book on the Sitar in Calcutta. Unfortunately, some Western writers seem to believe no work on Indian

themes is complete without these forays in mystic realms.

After a brief political and sociological profile of Calcutta, the author takes up 'Gharana and Patronage' in Chapter I. He describes *gharana*, *baj*, and *chal*. With reference to *gharana*, he arrives at the terms Kalawant and Mirasi, quoting Naniel Neuman to say that the Kalawants are soloists whose pedigree includes no Sarangi or Tabla player whereas the Mirasis are accompanists. It must be pointed out here that this classification does not apply any more—there have been several renowned vocalists descended from Sarangi players: Abdul Karim Khan and Amir Khan, to name just two.

By *baj* Hamilton means merely a set of performance techniques on instruments and by *chal* the tempo the Sitar and Sarod employ. However, he leaves off the technical discussion abruptly and launches into an account of the changing patronage of musicians in the 20th century. He talks of court patronage, the employment of classical musicians in theatre, the introduction of the gramophone, public concerts, and finally the emergence of All India Radio. The role of A.I.R. as patron and disseminator of music is dealt with at length, with documentation on the expansion of broadcasting services in India, output hours, programme composition, listeners' response to classical music, etc.

This leads to some analysis of how broadcasting has affected the Indian music scene—popularizing classical music and bringing about changes in the traditional learning system: students now listen to a wider variety of music including artists they have never seen or those who are not contemporaries. This digression, though it has its points of interest, is again not directly relevant to the subject of the book.

However, Hamilton switches over at this point to an account of the six *gharanas* of Sitar and Sarod represented in Calcutta: the Gulam Ali Khan Sarod *gharana*, the Vishnupur *gharana*, the Indore Binkar *gharana*,

and the Jaipur Sitar *gharana*. He provides a map showing the places of origin of these *gharanas*, *vanshavali* and *shishyavali* charts, and pictures of several notable artists. Curiously, there are no charts for the Maihar and Vishnupur *gharanas*. This is a serious omission as no discussion of the Sitar and Sarod can afford to leave out the contribution of Allauddin Khan of Maihar and his students Ali Akbar Khan and Ravi Shankar.

Chapter II deals with the development of the Sitar and its *baj*. The author suggests that according to Hornbostel-Sachs, the long-necked bowl lute evolved in Mesopotamia early in the second millennium B.C. and the necked spike lute in Egypt at about the same time. As a result of intercultural contacts, these instruments came to be used by musicians in neighbouring areas. In new socio-cultural settings these instruments underwent modification in design, and were constructed from materials readily available in their new homelands. In an effort to trace possible ancestors of the Indian Sitar, this section surveys a variety of near-Eastern, North African, as well as Central Asian long-necked lutes. Four maps illustrate the Aryan migration, the expansion of the Muslim world, the conquests of Mahmud of Ghazni, and the Turkish migration and conquests which created a mixed socio-cultural environment in South and Central Asia.

Discussing the various possibilities of the origin of the Sitar, Hamilton refers to Prajnanananda, Krishnaswami, and Deva. He rejects Prajnanananda's surmise that the Sitar is a developed form of the Chitra Veena (a Saptatantri Veena mentioned in the *Natyashastra*) because his evidence suggests that it was not until the latter half of the 19th century that the Sitar came to have seven strings. He goes on to discuss and ultimately refute the possibility of Amir Khusro having created the Sitar. Here he points out that in the *Ain-i-Akbari* there is mention of many non-Indian musical instruments including the Tanbur. This instrument, Hamilton feels, was not a drone

instrument but more probably a fretted instrument of near-Eastern or Central Asian origin. It is highly probable that some form of Tanbur was introduced into north India about the time of Amir Khusro and had become popular by the time of Akbar. Amir Khusro might have modified this instrument and thus contributed to the development of the Sitar.

In this discussion a connection is suggested between the Afghan Tanbur and the Sitar. Hamilton says that prior to the era of Muslim expansion in South Asia there were no long-necked lutes in the region. Perhaps there was an indigenous Indian instrument called Tambura but the name would have come from *tumba*, the resonating gourd of Indian lutes. The long-necked modern Tambura is a relatively recent introduction to the region.

The views of the author are not fully acceptable as researchers have found many evidences that the Sitar is an indigenous instrument and a developed and modified form of the Tritantri Veena (called Jantar according to Kallinath, the commentator of the *Sangeeta Ratnakara*). Lal Mani Mishra puts forward this view in his book *Bharatiya Sangeet Vadya*. He says that the ancient Tritantri Veena developed into two instruments: the drone instrument Tambura, and the fretted Sitar. These two instruments were also called Anibaddha and Nibaddha Tamburas. Both were used initially to support vocal music. In the latter half of the 18th century some musicians took up the Nibaddha Tambura—the Sitar—and developed it as a solo instrument.

Coming to Sitar *baj*, Hamilton cites Ray Chaudhuri's view that there was a Sister style before Masit Khani called the Amir Khusro *baj*. Perhaps the second Sitar *baj* which evolved was Feroz Khani. After that the Masit Khani *gat* (Hamilton consistently writes Masid Khani) developed, based on Khayal. The Raza Khani *gat*, based on Tarana, was introduced later by Raza Khan. Hamilton says Raza Khan was a disciple of Masit Khan. This is doubtful as the two

styles emerged in two different places—the Raza Khani in Delhi and the Masit Khani in Lucknow, which is why they are also called Panchhai *baj* and Purabi *baj* respectively. They were products of two different *gharanas* of Sitar.

The inclusion of *alap* in Sitar contributed to a modern version of the Masit Khani *baj*, which Hamilton calls Adhunik Masit Khani *baj* or Imdad Khani *baj*. All these styles are illustrated in the book by charts (in the appendices) giving the original form of each *baj*, its practical interpretation, ornaments, tempo, stroke patterns, etc. For example, one composition in each style is notated. Interestingly, a combination of staff notation and Bhatkhande's notation is used here, with a glossary to interpret the notation. This hybrid notation has its possibilities.

Hamilton asserts that the Adhunik Masit Khani *baj*, which is now popular all over northern India, originated and developed in Calcutta primarily on account of the efforts of Imdad Khan, though Ustads of other *gharanas* also made their contributions. He briefly discusses the influence of Sitar *baj* on Sarod *baj* as

... both the instruments encompass a similar pitch range and any melodic passage produced on one instrument can, in most instances, be duplicated on the other.

The last section of this chapter describes the *gat* and its components *sthayi*, *manjha*, and *antara*. Hamilton rightly says that Western musical terminology cannot be used satisfactorily in the context of Indian music: for example *gat*, a type of fixed instrumental music, cannot really be understood as composition.

Scale, mode, *thāt*, *mela* and *raga* are discussed in Chapter III. The author feels there is no equivalent of *raga* in Western music, just as there is no exact Indian equivalent of scale in Western music.

After a brief introduction to the *rāgāṅga* system, two new *rāgāṅga* groupings are introduced: the "Greater *rāgāṅga*" group including Bhairav, Todi, Asawari, Bilawal, Sarang, Purvi, Kalyan, Malkauns, Kanara,

and Malhar, and the "Lesser Rāgāṅga" group comprising Bahar, Sindhura, Nat, Dhani, Tilang, Hindol, and Durga. Hamilton does not say why he chooses to remake the *rāgāṅgas*. He also does not explain why Kafi and Khamaj are not included as *rāgāṅgas*—greater or lesser—or Durga accepted as one. And what are the *ragas* included in the latter *rāgāṅga*?

It might be mentioned here that the *rāgāṅga* system of classification was introduced by Narain Moreshwar Khare as an alternative to Bhatkhande's *thāt* system which was unable to accommodate all *ragas*. This simple system has found general acceptance precisely because it can accommodate any number of *ragas* or *rāgāṅgas*. Despite this facility, Hamilton tampers with the system by introducing a hierarchy of *rāgāṅgas* and rejecting some established groups. I for one feel this is unnecessary as the *rāgāṅgas* in vogue can take in most of the *ragas* of Hindustani music.

The author now goes on to subjects like *rasa*, the *raga*-time association, *raga-ragini* classification, and Ragamala paintings. The notation of *ragas* Bhairavi, Jaunpuri, Kafi, Khamavati, and Yaman is provided, illustrating the difference of intonation and *chalan* in respect of different artists.

Chapter IV is devoted to the Gulam Ali Khan *gharana* of Sarod to which Hamilton's guru Radhika Mohan Moitra belonged. After a brief account of the *gharana* and its contribution to the development of the Sarod, the teaching method of the *gharana* is discussed. Though primarily a Sarod *gharana*, it has also had some Sitar players—Radhika Mohan himself played the Sitar in his youth and taught Sitar to many students. The structural details of the Sitar Radhika Mohan used are given, as also details of the tuning of different strings by Radhika Mohan, Ravi Shankar, Nikhil Banerjee, and Vilayat Khan. This is followed by the notation of five *ragas* taught to the author by

Radhika Mohan, including *chalan*, *Masit Khani gat*, *Raza Khani gat*, *tans*, and a *Bhairavi Thumri*.

Chapter V deals with the Imdad Khan Sitar and Surbahar *gharana*. A brief history of the *gharana*, life sketches of Imdad Khan, Inayat Khan, Vilayat Khan, and Benjamin Gomes—a lesser-known Sitar player of the *gharana*—are followed by a description of its teaching method, *baj*, and *chal*. Transcriptions of the Sitar lessons given by Benjamin Gomes to the author are provided.

Chapter VI concludes the book by summing up each chapter. It also provides a good deal of documentation on music and musicians in Calcutta. However, much of this material seems disparate and only tangentially relevant to a study of the Sitar in Calcutta. A fair chunk of data relates to broadcasting, a subject with which the author is inordinately occupied.

A similar disparateness marks the nine appendices, containing assorted information on such subjects as Hindu and Muslim castes in West Bengal, instruments used by the A.I.R. and Rabindra Bharati University orchestras, the Hornbostel-Sachs classification of chordophones, etc. However, some good drawings showing various parts of the Sitar are included.

The bibliography is followed by a glossary in which each term is printed, column-wise, in Bengali, Hindi, Sanskrit, and Urdu. This useless gimmick is also most repellent in print, as the words in Indian scripts are not typeset but written out in a large, ungainly, amateurish hand, with not a few errors.

Despite some redeeming features, this book does not qualify as a work on the Sitar in Calcutta. Indeed, no rationale is offered as to why the author chose to write on the Sitar as practised in Calcutta beyond the fact that he happened to learn the instrument these. Was it a random choice?

Suneera Kasliwal